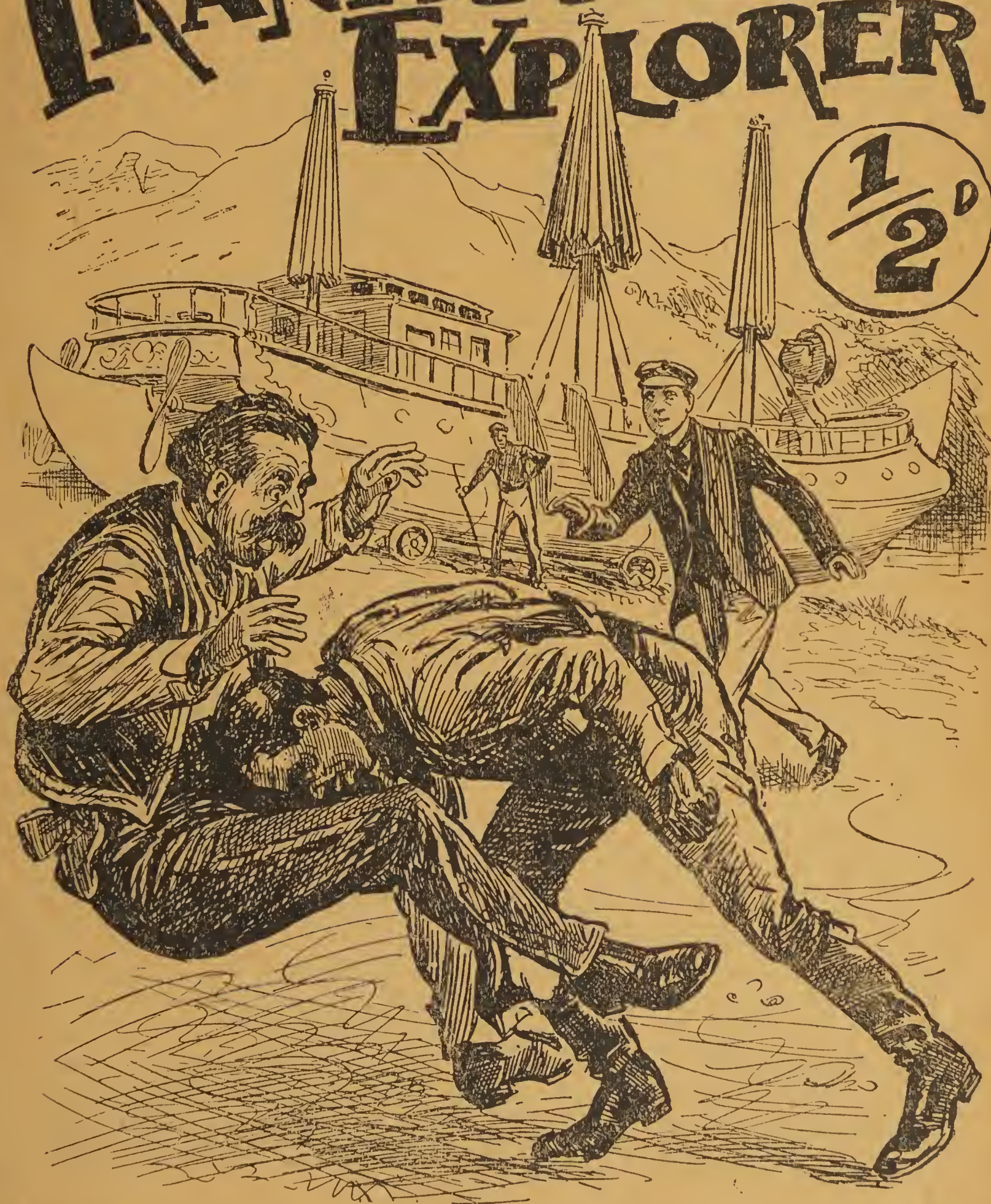


THE INVENTION LIBRARY, No. 28.

# FRANK READE, EXPLORER

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Pomp's hard head sent the burly Mexican to the ground with all the breath knocked out of his body.



# Frank Reade, Explorer.

## The Young Inventor's Amazing Adventures in the Wilds of Mexico.

### CHAPTER 1.

#### The Captive Among Savages.—A Fight and a Rescue.—A Hearty Reception.

FRANK READE had been returned but a few days from one of his airship trips when he received a request from an important syndicate of merchants to explore New Mexico. The object of this was to investigate the best possible methods of developing the commerce of the country.

After due consideration Frank agreed to undertake the trip, and Pomp and Barney, his two faithful assistants, were readily induced to accompany him.

The syndicate was represented by Charles Kensel, a merchant, and an engineer named Sallinger, whose mission was to survey a proposed line of railway through the country of the Aztecs.

Kensel and Sallinger were quite nervous as they shook hands with their friends who had assembled to see them start.

"How will she stand a cyclone?" Sallinger asked of Frank.

"She won't stand it at all," replied Frank. "She will have to travel with it."

Sallinger stopped, and looked first at Kensel and then at the young inventor. Frank smiled.

"That is where our safety would lie," remarked the young inventor. "By going with it and keeping up a good distance from the earth we should soon ride through it."

That was lucid enough, and Sallinger sat down alongside of Kensel with a little resignation.

At the proper time Frank cried out:

"Good-bye till we come back!" and then touched the rotascope knob.

The steel mast at once began to revolve, and the leaves of the rotascope opened like the folds of an immense umbrella.

The dust rose in a cloud from the earth all around the airship.

Faster and faster went the rotascope, and in another minute the airship began to rise. Barney and Pomp sprang up and began cheering and waving their hats. Kensel and Sallinger waved theirs also, catching the enthusiasm of the other two, and in a little

while the airship was a thousand feet or more above the earth.

Then Frank set the propeller going, and the airship moved off in a southerly direction.

"This is the triumph of inventive genius," said Kensel, in a burst of admiration at the grand panorama spread out before him.

"Yes," added Sallinger. "I never thought that I should ever be a passenger on one of the noted Frank Reade's airships."

All the afternoon the airship sailed steadily southward, passing over towns, villages, rivers, and many beautiful farms. When night came on Frank began to look about him for a camping-place.

"We want to stop where there is plenty of water, so that we can have fish for supper and a swim in the morning."

But the stars came out long before any river was seen.

"We may as well keep on now," said Frank, "and sail all night. We shall be that much nearer our objective point in the morning."

"But what will you do for sleep?"

"Barney and Pomp will relieve me by turns."

"I—I don't think I shall sleep at all to-night," said Sallinger, evidently nervous of being in the hands of the assistants.

Frank laughed.

"Barney and Pomp have both run an airship all night long before this," he said. "Don't you suppose that I value my life as highly as you do yours?"

Sallinger was silenced for the time, but he was not feeling very comfortable—that was plainly to be seen. He did not lie down in his berth until he had seen Pomp running the airship for nearly an hour. Then, however, he retired, and slept soundly till called up the next morning by Pomp.

He found that the airship was at rest on the banks of a stream, and that the others of the party were busy preparing breakfast.

That day they passed over into the Indian territory, and Kensel and Sallinger at once became interested in everything they saw below them.

About noon they struck a picturesque Indian village—a regular wigwam settlement.



As they looked down the women, children, and old men poured out of their quarters to gaze up at the airship.

Frank looked through his field-glass, and saw that not a single warrior was in the village.

"We can go down there," he said. "The warriors are all away on a hunt."

He touched the knob that controlled the rotascope, and lessened the revolutions to such speed as to cause the airship to sink towards the earth. The Comanche women and children began to screech and give other evidences of great terror. And when they saw that the airship was going to settle down right in the streets of the village the old men, women, and children fled through the timber towards the river, leaving everything to the mercy of the strangers.

"Do you want to go through the village and look into the wigwams?" Frank asked, turning to Sallinger and Kensel.

"Any danger?" Sallinger asked.

"None whatever. They are scared nearly to death."

"Let's see them, then."

Frank left Barney and Pomp in charge of the airship and led the other two through the village.

In every wigwam they found scalps hanging up as trophies of the warpath.

"You see the Comanches are still a bad crowd," said Frank, as he pointed to the scalps. "They don't wear the scalps as they did fifty or one hundred years ago, but they keep them to show around among themselves. They are the worst lot of all the red rascals on the continent."

Besides scalps they saw splendid buffalo-skins in the wigwams, with numerous blankets, robes, and other things for comfort. Their cooking utensils were, however, of the crudest kind.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Frank, as he entered one of the wigwams and found a young Mexican girl lying asleep on a buffalo-skin.

She sprang up and addressed them in Spanish.

"Who are you, senors?" she asked.

"We are Americans," returned Frank, in the same tongue. "What are you doing here, senorita?"

"I am a captive; have been here two weeks."

"Where do you live?"

"On the Rio Grande, below Laredo."

"How did you come here?"

"I was captured when out riding one evening. So little noise was made that I don't think my people know where I am or that the Indians have me in their clutches."

"How have they treated you?"

"The chief has been trying to force me to become his wife."

"Do you wish to go home?"

"Yes, senor."

"Come with us, then."

She quickly gathered up such things as belonged to her and followed them out of the wigwam. A moment later they were startled by wild yells and rifle-shots from the airship.

At the sound of the first shot Frank stopped and listened. He knew the Comanche yell as well as he knew the English language.

"The warriors have returned," he said, turning to Sallinger and Kensel, "and Barney and Pomp are having some fun with them. We have our revolvers, and must fight our way back to the airship," and he drew a brace of revolvers as he spoke.

Sallinger and Kensel did likewise. They were pale, but never flinched.

"If we go up behind the wigwams we may pass unseen to the woods," cried the girl.

She had not seen or heard of the airship.

"We don't want to go to the timber," said Frank. "Come on; we'll take the rascals in the rear and give 'em a dose of lead!"

He ran forward, followed by the others, till the end of the row of wigwams was reached. There they came in sight of about a score of Comanche warriors who had just returned from a hunt down the river. The redskins had not heard of the airship, and did not know what to make of it when they saw it resting on the ground in the village.

But, Indian-like, they started to take possession of it.

Barney and Pomp had got out the repeating-rifles and given them a volley that laid two of them out.

Then the red rascals had yelled and fired in return.

Barney and Pomp had yelled, too, and began to have fun with them.

"Whoop!" yelled Barney. "Come on, ye blayguards! an' it's mesilf as kin bate the loife out ov yees!"

"Hi, dar, yer red niggers!" cried Pomp, aiming at one and breaking his arm. "Wha' for youse shoot at us?"

The next moment Frank and our three friends burst upon the dumfounded redskins and opened fire on them in their rear.

The Comanches made a dash for the timber. They didn't know how many whites might be in the village, and so they thought it best to fall back and see what they could find out.

Frank ran to the airship and helped the Mexican girl on board. She looked around in the greatest amazement, not knowing what to make of the strange vessel.

"Lead her into the cabin, Sallinger," said Frank, as he set the rotascope in motion.

Sallinger could speak Spanish fairly fluently, and he took the girl's hand and led her into the cabin, where he told her to take a seat and not leave until called. The next minute the ship began to rise. The girl felt the motion and sprang to her feet in great alarm.

"Keep quiet, senorita," he said. "We are getting out of the way of the Indians."

"But we are going up in the air!"



"Yes, and out of harm's way."

She was terrified.

"We are in an airship, senorita," said Sallinger, "which sails through the air as well as other ships sail through the water."

He stayed to reassure her till her fears were allayed. Then he led her out of the cabin to let her see the village a half-mile below, where the redskins were whooping and howling over the escape of their strange visitors.

By degrees they succeeded in quieting the girl's fears, and then she sat down and gave them the particulars of her capture by the Indians.

That evening the airship settled down on the banks of another stream, where game was plentiful and the solitude invited repose.

The camp was soon pitched, and in a little while a sumptuous repast was prepared.

They were up early the next morning, and, after a hearty breakfast, set out for the Rio Grande, which they expected to reach that day.

Maria Sanchez became as talkative as a parrot, and never let a minute pass without asking a question about something she saw or heard.

"Dar's de ribber!" cried Pomp, in the middle of the afternoon, as he espied the great river in the distance.

"Where?—where?" the girl exclaimed.

"Ober dar," replied Pomp, pointing to a spot straight ahead.

Maria looked, but could see nothing that looked like a river.

"Why, I don't see any river," she said.

"Nor I," added Sallinger.

Frank picked up his field-glass and took a peep through it.

"Pomp's eyes are good at long range," he remarked. "That is the river, sure enough."

Kensel and Sallinger took a look at it through the glass.

Presently Maria Sanchez cried out:

"Oh, I know where we are now! We are going below Laredo, and my home is not far away. I know that bend in the river, and—Oh, there's our home! That house away out there where you see the smoke curling up. That is where we have lived for three years. My father came there from Mexico."

The young girl was overjoyed at seeing her home once more, and did not tire of talking about it.

"But you must stop over with us till to-morrow morning," she said, "so that I can have a chance to return your kindness to me. I want you to be my guests as I have been yours. Will you stop?"

"Of course we will," said Frank. "How could we refuse such a request as that?"

"You see the yard in front of the house?" the girl prattled on, when they drew nearer.

"Can you land the ship there?"

"Yes, with ease."

"Then do so. Oh, there's father, mother, sister, and my two young brothers. They are

looking at us. They don't know what to make of it."

The party on the ground seemed to be rooted to the spot. But when the ship settled down in the yard, and they saw Maria step forth and run towards them, they all rushed forward to embrace her; and a happier group for the next few minutes our heroes had never seen.

The joyous meeting over, our heroes came in for their share of attention. The entire family gazed at them and the airship as if greatly puzzled what to think of the strange manner in which they had made their appearance.

In a few words the girl told the story of her capture and rescue, and the simple-hearted parents needed no more to fill their hearts with a feeling of unbounded gratitude towards Frank and his friends.

The old man's voluble Spanish was poured out in showers of blessings on the heads of the three Americans, whilst the happy mother indulged in a burst of joyful tears.

The supper which, a little later, was set before our heroes was even better than they expected. Numerous jars of sweetmeats, which the thrifty housewife had had hidden away for many months, were brought out and placed on the table for the first time, to the great delight of the younger branches of the family.

After supper Maria devoted herself to the entertainment of her rescuers.

At a late hour our heroes repaired to the airship to sleep, and found that Barney and Pomp had arranged everything for their comfort.

They were awakened at daylight by the shrill crowing of two roosters on the place.

After breakfast came the leave-taking.

The daughter and parents were profuse in their expressions of gratitude, and pressed them to stop there on their return from their trip across Mexico.

"I shall never cease to think of you," said Maria Sanchez, as she bade Frank good-bye, "and shall expect to see you again when on your way back to New York."

"If we come within one hundred miles of your home we shall call to see you," said our hero, as he shook her hand and stepped on board the airship.

The next moment the rotascope began to revolve, and the airship rose rapidly above the tree-tops, whilst the Mexican's family waved them a good-bye.

Up, up they went, till they were high enough to get a view of many miles of the great river as it rolled its muddy current towards the gulf.

Laredo was at least twenty miles away to the north of them, and it was from that point they wanted to start the survey.

"We must make Laredo the first place," said Frank, "as we are to start from that point."

"Yes," returned Kensel; "keep up the river. I want to take it in as we go along."



## CHAPTER 2.

**In the Toils of a Serpent.—Pomp to the Rescue.—Frank Tackles the Bandits.**

THEY came in sight of Laredo in about half an hour.

It stood on the left bank of the river, a small town of rather dingy appearance, and its chief importance lay in the fact that it boasted a Custom house and a few officials.

All along the Mexican border smuggling was rife. It seemed impossible to prevent it, as men could cross the river in boats at night miles below or above the Custom houses, and make their way into the country without much fear of detection.

On the Mexican side of the river opposite Laredo the country was very sparsely settled. A thick growth of chaparral brush covered the earth, through which ran roads but little travelled. Beyond, in the dim distance, the blue outlines of mountains could be seen.

Kensel and Sallinger got out their instruments and prepared to make a thorough survey of the country beneath them. Mile after mile was passed, after which Sallinger asked that the airship be lowered nearer to the earth, in order to enable him to get a better view with the naked eye.

It was accordingly lowered to about one thousand feet above the earth.

"This will do," said Sallinger. "Just the right elevation. I don't care how fast we go now."

Thus they pushed on till sunset brought them to the hilly region.

"Where shall we stop to-night?" Kensel inquired, as the sun began to sink behind the distant mountains.

"At the first place where we can have plenty of water," said Frank.

"Is there any game in this part of Mexico?"

"Yes, and some very dangerous game, too," was the reply. "You want to be careful how you wander off into the woods. There are huge snakes, cougars, panthers, and Mexican lions, all of which are dangerous."

"Dar's water down dar!" cried Pomp, pointing to a creek which was bounding over a rocky bed between two high hills.

"Just the place," said Frank, "provided we can find an open space large enough for us to make a descent."

The airship made several circles over the place, whilst our heroes looked about in vain for a place to land. At last they had to give it up and start in another direction.

"Hanged if I am not disposed to settle down on the water," said Frank, "and tie up to the bank."

"Well, there's a smooth sheet of water just below the rapids."

"Yes, and I am going down there."

The airship descended slowly, and in ten minutes was riding on the clear waters of the creek, which formed a smooth basin of something like two hundred feet in circumference.

"Tie her up to the bank, Pomp."

Barney and Pomp caught hold of a limb of a tree and began pulling the airship in, when a sudden violent shaking of the tree startled them. The next moment a long, sinuous, black serpent swept Barney off the deck and swung him ashore in its coils.

Not one of the other three knew what had happened until the yells of Barney and Pomp called their attention to the terrible situation.

However, faithful old Pomp was quick to act in the time of peril. Drawing his big camp-knife he sprang after Barney. The anaconda, for such it proved to be, had its tail lashed around the tree as a vantage-ground from which to exert its immense power. Its movements were as quick as lightning, and ere Barney could use his hands to protect himself in any way half a dozen folds of the serpent's body were coiled around him.

But Pomp rushed upon the serpent so quickly that Barney was not immediately crushed. Quick as a flash the negro ran his camp-knife through the serpent's neck, and gave a desperate jerk that severed the head from the body and left it clinging to its collar.

Instantly Barney dropped of his own weight, comparatively unharmed, just as Frank rushed up with a hatchet in his hand. The whole thing was over within half a minute.

"Dar now!" exclaimed Pomp, "you'se doan' eat no mo' folkse, you'se doan't."

"Ah! you were just in time, Pomp!" exclaimed Frank, as he saw what had been done. "Are you hurt, Barney?"

"Bedad, an' it's meself as is thrying ter foind out that same!" answered the Irishman, feeling himself all over. "Shure, an' if it's dead I am, I don't know it!"

He was so badly shaken up that he was unable to say whether he was hurt or not. Frank told him to take a rest, and set Pomp to work to make a fire. Then Frank got out his fishing tackle, and, having secured bait, went on board the airship and cast his hook into the water on the other side of it. It was not long ere Pomp was busy cooking a fine dish of fish which the young inventor had caught.

After supper they sat on the deck of the airship, smoked their pipes, and talked of adventures in different parts of the world. Frank told of many escapes which had never been recorded in print, in which his listeners were deeply interested.

That night they all slept without anything occurring to disturb their slumbers, and the next morning they were up before the sun, preparing to resume their journey.

"We had better move down this stream a few miles, in order that we may find a gap in these mountains," said Sallinger, when they were about to start. "It would be extremely difficult to cut a railway through these rocks here."



"Yes," said Kensel. "I was thinking of that last night just before I dropped to sleep."

The rotascope began to revolve at a rapid rate, and in a little while the airship rose up out of the water.

Up, up it rose, and when about a thousand yards above the earth they moved off down the stream.

"It's a pretty rough country through here for a railway," remarked Kensel.

"Yes," said Frank; "but the railways will be built in time. But look over there! There's the gap you are looking for. Your railway can run through there, I think."

Sallinger took his glass and looked over the gap in the mountains, whilst Kensel used the instruments which enabled him to ascertain the rise and depressions of the earth's surface below.

"Why, there's a road running up through there!" exclaimed Sallinger.

"That shows that a railway could be built there, then."

They followed the road as it wound around the base of the mountain-spurs, noting every curve and turn. In one place they saw a party of Mexicans on horseback.

"That must be a military company," said Sallinger, "for every man of them carries a gun."

Frank took the glass and looked down at the men.

"It's a band of guerillas, as the outlaws in these parts are called," he said. "The rascals are always fighting among themselves."

"They haven't seen us yet."

"No; but when they do they will be frightened almost out of their boots."

In a little while one of the Mexicans looked up and caught sight of the airship.

He set up a yell of dismay. The entire band stopped and gazed up at the wonder in the air. Such a sight appalled them. They could not account for it, for none of them had ever heard of Frank Reade or his wonderful inventions. They were ignorant and superstitious, and very readily attributed the airship to supernatural causes.

The airship pursued its way westward till the road led into a small mountain settlement which seemed to be a mining town.

"We ought to stop here and see what the people think of the guerillas who are marching on them."

"I think so, too, Mr. Reade," said Kensel.

The airship descended towards the plaza, or square, in the centre of the village. When about a thousand feet above the earth some of the villagers caught sight of it, and set up a terrible howling. Men, women, and children ran out into the streets frightened out of their wits. Some crossed themselves, but gazed at the four white men who stepped out of the airship the moment it touched the earth.

"Where is the alcalde?" Frank asked, in a loud voice and in good Spanish.

Every man who had prostrated himself sprang to his feet and gazed at the young inventor.

"I want to see the alcalde," said Frank. "Send him to me at once. Your homes are in danger."

Two men took to their heels and ran down one of the narrow streets of the village as fast as they could go.

While they were waiting for the alcalde the women and children gradually came nearer to the airship. One of the young girls about sixteen years old, tall and graceful, attracted the attention of Kensel.

"Just look at that girl!" he said to Sallinger. "Did you ever see a more beautiful girl anywhere?"

"She is indeed beautiful," replied Sallinger, gazing at the girl.

"I'll give her a ring as a tribute to her beauty," said Kensel, taking a plain gold ring from the little finger of his left hand.

He approached the girl, who seemed inclined to run away with the rest of her companions. But a motion from him caused her to stop. He took her hand in his, placed the ring on her finger, kissed her hand, and then returned to the airship.

The young girl stood rooted to the spot, her colour coming and going under the tremendous excitement the simple tribute had raised in her heart. No sooner had Kensel returned to the airship than the young girl was immediately surrounded by all her young companions, who eagerly examined the ring.

"You've made every girl in the town her enemy," said Sallinger. "They will never forgive her for being beautiful."

"I am afraid I have," said Kensel; "but I didn't mean to do that."

"Here comes the alcalde," said Frank, as he saw a dignified old Mexican approach, followed by a number of others.

The alcalde came forward and bowed himself almost to the earth.

"You are the alcalde?" Frank asked, in good Spanish.

"Si (yes), senor."

"Well, I am travelling through your country in my airship. This morning we saw a band of guerillas marching on your town, and I thought it my duty to stop and tell you about it. They are something like fifteen miles away."

"I am a thousand times indebted to you, senor," replied the alcalde; "but I don't know how we are to be protected from them. We have no soldiers here, and but few of our people have any arms."

"Do you wish us to aid you in driving them back?"

"In Heaven's name we should thank you, senor, but what can so few do? Gomez, who I know is the leader of the band, has more than one hundred rifles."

"Oh, we can send him back very easily if you wish us to do so."



"Then do so, and we shall call down the blessings of all the saints on your head."

"I will do so. Tell your people not to be alarmed."

The alcalde turned to his people and told them what the stranger had told him about Gomez, the guerilla, and said:

"The Americanos will drive them back. They can sail through the air and keep out of reach of danger and kill all Gomez's men with the greatest ease."

The people began to crowd around their visitors, and asked a thousand questions.

Barney and Pomp could neither speak nor understand Spanish, but they smiled and talked all the same.

The alcalde was invited on board, where a bottle of wine was opened. The old dignitary astonished our heroes by his tremendous capacity to store wine under his vest. He got away with an entire bottle in ten minutes, and then intimated that he was dry.

After being supplied with a second bottle the old man pressed our hero to stay over till the next day, and promised to give a ball in his honour if he would do so. Anxious to cultivate the good will of the Mexicans Frank accepted the invitation.

As soon as news of the ball spread the young people began to slip away to their homes to prepare for the occasion.

Late in the afternoon a Mexican came into the town, having ridden a mustang nearly to death, to bring the news that Gomez, the guerilla chieftain, was within three miles of the place.

Frank sent the airship up, and when about a thousand feet above the earth he could see the dust raised by the guerillas in their mad gallop towards the little town.

"There they are, over there!" he said. "Get the rifles ready, Barney!"

Then the airship sailed off towards the guerillas, and met them at a point about two miles out. Of course, the band stopped to look at the strange thing sailing around over their heads at least a quarter of a mile high.

Frank wrote on a piece of paper in pure Spanish:

"If Gomez and his men do not go back and leave the people of this state undisturbed they will all be killed."

He signed no name to this, but tied it to a bullet and dropped it overboard.

It fell in the road right in front of the band, and the chief ordered one of his men to bring it to him. When he read the note he looked up at the airship in dumfounded amazement. But he was a determined brute, and would not yield to the commands of any one.

He ordered his band to move forward.

"Shoot down that fellow's horse, Barney!" ordered Frank.

Barney did so, and the horse and the rider

rolled in the dust together. The chief sprang up and ordered his whole band to fire at the airship. They did so, but not a bullet went half high enough to do any damage. Then the chief mounted another horse, but Barney brought him down in the same way. Then Frank dropped another note tied to a bullet, which said:

"If the fool Gomez wishes to stop a bullet he can do so. If he does not retreat he will be shot as a traitor to Mexico."

The guerilla chief was a hot-tempered fellow, and for a time was bent on defying the unknown enemy in the air. But his band had seen that, while they could not reach the enemy, the enemy could reach them, and as if by a preconcerted signal the whole party wheeled and dashed off down the road whence they came, leaving their leader standing on foot in the middle of the highway.

The airship circled around and settled in the middle of the road, not very far from where the chief stood, revolver in hand.

"Who are you?" Gomez demanded, the moment the airship touched the ground.

"I am the guardian of Mexico," replied Frank, looking the desperado full in the face. "If you again raise your hand in violence against any citizen of Mexico you will die the death of a dog!"

Gomez glared at him in trembling silence for a moment or two, and then turned and dashed down the road as fast as his heels could carry him.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Treachery.—A Dash for Safety.—Tricking the Guests.

THE airship once more ascended and sailed back to the little town, and a little later Frank and his friends made their way to the place where the ball was to be held.

The long, low-ceilinged room was crowded. The alcalde was there in all his glory, and with an appetite for all the wine he could get hold of. Being the head man of the town he did the honours of the occasion.

Frank opened the ball with the alcalde's wife, a fat, puffy old lady on the shady side of fifty. But she could dance with a vigour that astonished him.

Sallinger led off with another married lady, and Kensel had the girl to whom he had given the ring for a partner.

The girl's name was Inez Garcelon, daughter of a small tradesman of the town. She was the belle of the place, a graceful dancer, and as full of romance as an egg is of meat.

The presentation of the ring that day had turned her head completely, and she refused to dance with the young man who had been courting her for nearly a year previous to the advent of our heroes.



What is more, she would not allow Kensel to leave her side for a moment, and, truth to tell, the young man was well content to remain with her.

They danced nearly every set together, and the girl's infatuation increased with each passing moment. The dance continued all through the night, and when it was nearing daybreak she began to beg him not to go away in the airship.

"My duty compels me to go," he said, firmly; "but we will come back this way at the end of a month."

At the end of the last dance but one they went into the grounds to gain a breath of fresh air, and while they were there a man darted upon them from behind a tree and flashed a bright-bladed knife before Kensel's face.

Kensel sprang aside and caught the upraised arm, just as a piercing scream escaped Inez. The cry brought scores rushing to the spot, and then Kensel's assailant was found to be Inez's jealous lover.

The infuriated Mexican tried hard to get at Kensel with the knife, but the young man was at home in a scrimmage. By a dexterous blow he sent the knife flying, and then he began to put in some fine work on the Mexican's anatomy.

Thwack! and an eye was frescoed. Thwack! and the Mexican went to grass with more stars dancing before his eyes than he had ever dreamed were in the heavens.

"Whoop!" yelled Barney. "Won't some yaller son ov a gun stip on me corns?"

"Shut up, Barney!" ordered Frank, fearful that the Irishman would start a general fight.

But the Mexican had had enough.

He arose, pulled himself together, and walked off with some friends, vowing by all the saints to be avenged on both the faithless Inez and the stranger.

The whole thing was over in less than three minutes, and the dancers returned to the hall to have the last round before breaking up. When the last dance was ended the young girl refused to go home with her parents unless Kensel accompanied her also.

They could do nothing with her. Kensel was annoyed. He could not get away from her for five minutes.

At last he accompanied her parents to their home, followed by Barney and Sallinger, in order to protect him in case of attack by her lover and his friends. When they reached the house, however, the girl would not let Kensel leave her for a moment. She knew he was to sail that morning, and could not make up her mind to part with him even for one short month.

However, he got rid of her at length, and hastened to leave the place.

"I never saw such infatuation in all my life," he said to himself. "She is beautiful, but, after all, is nothing but a doll. What's more, she's ignorant and superstitious in the

extreme. Hallo, Barney—Sallinger! What are you two doing here?"

"Reade suggested that we should come along to see that you did not meet with foul play on the way back."

They walked back in the grey light of the dawn, and were just flattering themselves that they would have no trouble, when they saw five men coming towards them.

"Great Scott!" gasped Sallinger, "there's your man with his friends!"

"Be the powers!" exclaimed Barney, "it's a ruction we'll have!"

Kensel glanced at the men and recognised his foe among them.

"There are five of them," he said—"five to our three. We have nothing to fear if we don't let 'em get in the first shot."

"That's so," said Sallinger. "Let's draw and be ready for them."

All three men drew their revolvers and walked forward, as if they took no thought of the Mexicans. The Mexicans saw the revolvers and stood still, glaring at them as they passed by.

"Look out for shots in the back!" whispered Sallinger.

The warning came just in time. As our heroes wheeled round and confronted the Mexicans the latter were drawing their weapons. They were caught. Sallinger was a man of nerve when danger threatened. Quick as a flash he raised his revolver and covered the foremost Mexican, calling out sternly, in good Spanish:

"Drop your guns, or you are dead men!"

Barney and Kensel covered the other two nearest them, but the fourth and fifth men, seeing they were not covered, prepared to fire.

Barney was quicker than they. He changed his aim and fired at the fifth man, breaking his pistol arm.

Crack! Kensel shot the other one in the shoulder, and he set up a howl and ran off as fast as his heels could carry him. That demoralised the others, and in another moment the other four went after him at the top of their speed.

Our friends lost no time then in getting on board the airship, and a few minutes later they were rising above the tree-tops of the village. It was an early start, the sun being yet an hour behind. But Frank thought it the best thing for them to do.

Some time later in the day Kensel noticed a depression among the mountains, which he thought would prove of use in piercing the rocky wall in the event of railways being built. At his request Frank turned the airship in that direction.

The depression proved to be a gradual incline leading up between two immense spurs, and our heroes followed it for miles.

It was densely wooded, and presented some beautiful scenery which was greatly admired.

"By my soul!" exclaimed Sallinger, "I



believe nature made this pass expressly for a railway. Can you make a landing down there, Frank?"

"Yes, I think I can; at least, I can try."

The airship descended to within two hundred feet of the earth, and our hero looked about for some time before he could find a suitable spot to make a descent.

When he did discover the right place it was on a bare rock where no trees could grow.

Barney was the first one overboard.

"Be careful, Barney," said Frank. "This is a wild spot. You don't know what dangerous animals may be lurking about."

"Bedad, thin," said Barney, "it's a gun I'll be afther taking!"

Pomp handed him a rifle. Frank, Kensel, and Sallinger followed him, each carrying a repeating-rifle.

They descended the mountain slope, leaving Pomp in charge of the airship, and went some two hundred yards towards a deep gorge which Frank had seen in that direction.

The gorge presented a view such as none of them had ever seen before. The scenery was wild and picturesque in the extreme.

Suddenly, however, they were startled by a clap of thunder, which reverberated through the mountains for several seconds. Frank looked around in dumfounded amazement, thinking he had struck the enchanted mountains of Rip Van Winkle. But when he saw a black cloud coming up from the south-east he readily understood the origin of the clap of thunder.

"Come," he said, "we must get back to the airship as soon as possible. We've no time to lose."

"Is it a storm coming?" Sallinger asked.

"Yes," was the sententious reply, as the young inventor made haste up the mountain.

When they reached the airship they were almost out of breath. Frank did not lose a moment in consulting the barometer. He saw that it was falling rapidly, a sure sign that a storm was brewing—a regular cyclone, in fact.

"Up with her, Pomp!" he ordered.

"Yas, sah!" replied Pomp, starting the rotascope at once.

"Good heavens!" gasped Kensel. "Going up in this storm, Mr. Reade?"

"No; I am going up before the storm gets here."

Up went the airship higher and higher, until the whole earth seemed to be as flat as a pancake.

They could hear the rolling thunder and see the vivid flashes of lightning in the black cloud. The wind swayed the airship to and fro till even Barney turned pale, but Frank kept on rising higher and still higher.

"Heavens, Reade!" gasped Kensel, "how much higher are you going?"

"That depends upon the danger," was the quiet reply. "I think another mile will be sufficient."

By-and-by the dark cloud passed under them and shut out all view of the earth.

"Heavens! just look! We can't see the earth! We are lost!" cried Kensel.

The tremendous height to which they had ascended gave both the prospectors a shock. They could not understand that there was no more danger in three than in one mile altitude. Yet they could see that they had ridden above the storm, that the terrible cyclone had exhausted itself on the mountains below, while they were riding above it as peacefully as in a summer breeze. They both went into the cabin to lie down and resign themselves to a fate they could not avert.

Two hours later Frank called to them:

"Come out here, you two! I want to show you something."

They came out, and an exclamation of surprise burst from both of them. The earth lay smiling and fresh and green below them. Not a breath of wind was stirring, and rain-drops glistened in the sunlight on every leaf and twig.

Frank smiled; so did Pomp and Barney.

"Where are we now?" Kensel asked.

"About one hundred miles out of our course. We must go back where the storm struck us and take up the survey where we left off."

It was difficult to see the full extent of the damage committed by the storm. But when the airship got down to within a few hundred feet of the path of the storm the evidence of its awful destructiveness was plainly to be seen.

Trees were torn up by the roots and were scattered about in every direction. A wide path had been cut through the forest.

"I never saw anything like it," said Kensel.

"Nor I," put in Sallinger.

"I have seen much worse," said Frank, "and in this very country. It is worse in this climate than north of the Rio Grande, though they have some terrible ones in Texas sometimes. Have you caught on to the survey where you left off yesterday?"

"Yes, I believe I have," said Sallinger, consulting his instruments.

"Then we turn westward again, and see how the road can be made to crawl over those mountains." And the airship veered round and made a westerly course again.

"Go slow, as the mountain is rough in some parts, and I have to make calculations as we go along."

"Very well. Five miles an hour is the speed now."

They made a few miles, and then the pass through the mountains turned southward.

"We shall have to follow that," said Sallinger, "till we find our way out of it."

"It spreads out into a sort of plateau," remarked Kensel.

"Yes," said Frank; "and right here, several thousand feet above sea level, is the finest climate in the world. They have neither



summer nor winter here—it is always a May day season."

"It must indeed be a fine climate."

"Yes. I regard the table-lands of Mexico as having the finest climate in the world."

"Ah! there's a house out there!"

"Yes," said Frank; "and if you will look farther ahead you will see a village and haciendas, as they call the houses here, all around it."

Kensel seized his field-glass and took in the valley for many miles around.

"Yes," he said, "it's one of the most beautiful valleys I ever saw."

"Shall we stop at that town?" Sallinger presently asked, as the settlement came more plainly into view.

"I think we had better stop a little while—long enough to get at the name of the place," suggested Frank; and the party thought so, too.

When they beheld the airship hovering in the air above their quiet little town the inhabitants believed that some heavenly visitor was coming to give them the blessing of a celestial presence.

They ran out into the streets of the town and gazed up with faces that told of alternating hopes and fears.

The airship settled slowly down and landed in the centre of the main plaza. The people fled in every direction, and then, when at a safe distance, turned to gaze at their strange visitors.

Frank sprang out, followed by Sallinger and Kensel. Barney and Pomp remained in charge of the airship. Frank approached a group of men at the lower end of the plaza; but the fellows dispersed and scattered at his approach.

Frank cried out in Spanish:

"Mexicans, stop! We are friends."

That had a wonderful effect on them. A fat, jolly-looking priest, with his crown shaved as smooth as a billiard-ball, approached them. Frank advanced to meet him, extending his hand.

"Father, I am glad to meet you," he said.

"Who are you?" the padre asked, as he shook the young hero's hand.

"We are Americans travelling to the Pacific over your beautiful country."

"But you came through the air!" said the astonished padre, looking at the airship as it rested on the ground.

"Yes, that is our airship. We travel that way when we have long journeys to make."

The face of the padre was a picture to look at. The little town was so deep in the wilds that not even the priests had heard of the conquest of the air.

"I don't understand how you can fly through the air," said the padre.

"My ship is a simple mechanical apparatus which will soon be known to all the world," said Frank. "We came down to pay our respects to you, father, and the alcalde."

The padre was flattered. He was a good sort of a fellow, with the usual amount of human weakness with regard to flattery.

"We are glad to welcome you, senors," he said. "I will send for the alcalde, who will soon be here."

The padre turned and spoke to one of the many gaping rustics behind him, and the youth turned on his heels and quickly disappeared.

"Father, will you drink a bottle of wine with us?" asked Frank.

"Yes, my son—two, if you wish," was the ready answer.

The alcalde soon put in an appearance, and as soon as Sallinger saw him he whispered to Kensel:

"We sha'n't get off with less than half a dozen bottles."

And he was right.

Both the padre and the alcalde were men with hard heads. The alcalde proved himself a giant in wine drinking. He put away two full bottles himself. The padre managed to put himself on the outside of one and a-half bottles, whilst one bottle was enough for Frank and his two comrades.

After several hours' delay Frank began to weary of his guests. They had settled down into that condition of mental somnolence where all the world is forgotten—the natural consequence of a stomach full of generous wine.

The truth is the alcalde was drunk, and the padre was happy, and both were so good-natured that nothing could be said or done to disturb them.

"Why not tumble them out and sail away?" Kensel asked.

"Because, if we get the community down on us Americans, as we would be sure to do if we treat the padre and alcalde in that manner, you could never make a railway a success in this part of the country. We have plenty of time, and can spend the night here, if necessary. The only trouble is we sha'n't have any wine left if we do," remarked Kensel. "Those are the worst two old guzzlers I ever saw."

"I've seen much worse," said Frank; "but I confess that I wanted to murder them."

"Not a doubt of it," and Kensel laughed.

"Why not send out and buy some native wine," suggested Sallinger, "and fill up the empty bottles with it? I guess it's cheap here."

"Hanged if I don't act on that suggestion!" said Frank. "I've a lot of Mexican silver dollars, and I guess I can get one of those fellows out there to get the wine for me."

"Try it, anyhow."

The young inventor then negotiated with one of the Mexicans to purchase five gallons of good native wine for the ship.

The man took the money and ran off with it. In twenty minutes he returned, accompanied by a wine merchant, who delivered



some real good wine for the money that had been sent him.

By-and-by the padre woke up and looked around for a bottle with something in it. Pomp brought in one of the refilled bottles and placed it on the table immediately in front of him.

He poured out a glassful of it and drank it with great gusto. Frank and the others watched him to see if he had discovered the trick. To their surprise he took a second glass, and swallowed it as if it were nothing more than so much water.

Then the alcalde followed his example—in that he took two glasses brimming full.

The airship remained in the plaza, and the men, women, and children surged around it till near midnight. During all that time the alcalde and the padre still sat at the table drinking wine and dozing.

Pomp prepared supper, but the two guests were too full to partake of it. At last the alcalde's son came for him, and, with the aid of several others, both he and the jolly padre were taken away.

#### CHAPTER 4.

#### Bandits Again.—Pomp Loses His Temper— And a Bully Receives a Lesson.

WHEN the guests were gone our heroes arranged for watches during the night, and then retired to get some sleep.

Pomp called all of them to breakfast promptly the next morning, just as the sun was gilding the highest mountain peaks east of the town.

Just as they finished breakfast and were preparing to enjoy a smoke Frank saw the padre and about a score of men coming towards them.

"Up with her, Barney, or we'll have him with us all day!" he cried.

Barney rushed to the rotascope knob and set the electric battery in motion.

The rotascope began to revolve, and in another minute the airship swung clear of the earth.

The padre ran forward and yelled at the top of his voice. The men with him lifted up their voices and yelled in unison.

"Too late, my hearties!" said Frank, laughing. "You are pretty early, but you didn't quite catch us this time."

In a little while the airship passed from sight of the town in a south-westerly direction. Sallinger was busy at his instruments, making a map of the route as they went along, and keeping a record of the elevations and depressions of the earth's surface.

"There's a gap in the mountains on the right out there!" he cried, about an hour after the start.

"It appears to be a good wide pass," remarked Frank, as he gazed in the direction indicated.

"Yes, I think we had better go over there. It leads off in the right direction."

"Very well," said Frank; and the course of the airship was changed accordingly.

To their surprise they found that the pass was another long valley, or strip of table-land, in the mountains, where the soil was rich and the climate the finest in the world. Villages and small towns could be seen here and there.

"There's a big road down there," said Frank, pointing over the rail of the ship. "Mexico has some great highways all pointing towards the capital. I guess this one runs down through this gap until it comes out into the great table-lands."

Our heroes followed the road only a few yards, as their course compelled them to keep in a westerly direction. Following the pass they found that a stream, from a number of springs in the valley, flowed westward.

"Water never runs up hill," said Frank. "We are on the western slope of the mountains. That stream empties into the Pacific somewhere, I am sure."

"Let's follow it a while, and see if it leads us to a good outlet for the railway."

They followed it all the afternoon, and saw it grow larger every hour by the junction of other streams with it.

Night came on, and our heroes decided to settle down on the banks of the stream and camp there. They found fish plentiful, and had no trouble in catching all they wanted for their supper.

Just before they were about to retire to their berths on the airship they were startled by the sudden appearance of a dozen armed Mexicans. Frank readily recognised their character from their dress and manners. They were regular Mexican bandits.

Frank rose up and promptly commanded them to halt.

They came to a stop, and the leader turned on him and asked what he meant by ordering his men to halt in that fashion.

"I mean that I want you to halt!" was the reply.

"Do you dare halt Mexicans on Mexican soil?" hissed the leader, handling his sword threateningly.

"Yes, when Mexicans make a rush for my property."

"You are my prisoners—all of you!" exclaimed the bandit chief.

"You are mistaken, senor. You forget we are Americans, who are prisoners to no man."

The bandits turned and levelled their guns at Frank and his two friends.

But the next moment Barney and Pomp gave them a volley from the deck of the airship, and two of them tumbled headlong to the ground.

The bandits were utterly dumfounded.

They wheeled round to face the unknown foe, when Frank, Sallinger, and Kensel opened on them with their revolvers. Then Barney and Pomp gave them another round, and they fell on their knees and cried out:



"Quarter! Quarter! We surrender!"

Six of their number lay on the ground, three of whom were dead, and a fourth was gasping in his death agony.

The leader was unhurt, but was on his knees begging like a dog for his life.

"I've met such Mexicans as you before," said Frank, "and know how to deal with them. Now you'd better make yourselves very scarce around here."

They needed no second bidding. Without casting a look at their wounded companions they marched away in the darkness of the night, and were seen no more.

"Now we want to leave here, and at once," said Frank. "Those fellows will rouse up the natives around here, and seek revenge by attacking us before daylight. Get aboard at once."

They went aboard, where Pomp and Barney already had possession, and Frank at once set the rotascope going.

In another minute the airship was rising above the tree-tops and sailing in a westerly course, following the valley.

When they had gone about ten miles they settled down on the banks of the same stream within a few feet of the water.

"We can all turn in here and sleep," said Frank, "as nobody knows where we are. In the morning we will build a fire and cook breakfast. Then we'll go back and catch on where we left off and go on with the survey."

They turned in, and next morning Barney and Pomp were up early, building the fire by which to cook breakfast.

Frank and the others also were soon astir, preparing to try their luck at fishing in the stream.

Just as they had cast their hooks in the water Pomp, who was busy making a pot of coffee, felt himself seized by the collar and pulled around as if a giant had hold of him.

"Hi, dar!" he called, "lef go dar, I tole yer!"

He heard a gruff voice speak in Spanish, and then came a violent kick under his coat-tail.

That was enough.

He wriggled out of his coat in the twinkling of an eye and confronted his assailant, who proved to be a big, burly Mexican farmer.

"Wha' for yer kick me?" exclaimed Pomp.

"Hold on there, Pomp!" called Frank, starting to return to the fire to see what the Mexican wanted.

But Pomp's temper was up. He bowed his head and made a dash at the burly Mexican, striking him in the stomach with such force as to lay him on his back, with all the breath completely knocked out of him.

"Oh, thunder! Why didn't you wait?" said Frank.

"He kicked me, Marse Frank," answered Pomp, his eyes dancing with rage.

"What did he want?"

"Reckon as he wanted me ter butt 'im,"

replied the darkie, "an' I done it." And he shook his head as though he would like to do it again.

The Mexican was knocked out so thoroughly that it was several minutes ere he was able to pull himself together again.

When he was able to sit up he felt very ill and looked around him helplessly.

"Senor," said Frank, "you are ill. Have a glass of wine and you will feel better."

The Mexican seemed surprised at hearing good Spanish spoken, as well as at the kindly tone of the speaker. He looked up at Frank and said:

"Senor, I am hurt. I shall kill the black man!"

"The black man is my servant, senor," said Frank. "I shall order him to kill you if that is your intention in regard to him."

The Mexican swore in Castilian, and said:

"I am a gentleman, and——"

"But you acted like a brute, sir," said Frank, "to come into my camp and begin booting my servant. But then, I suppose, you are a fair sample of a Mexican gentleman."

"Who are you who thus insult a Mexican gentleman on his own estate?"

"I am an American citizen," replied the young inventor, "travelling through Mexico on business, and I must say you are the worst specimen of your nation I have met with yet."

The Mexican was now on his feet, and he towered at least a foot above Frank.

Barney, Sallinger, and Kensel had crowded around to see and hear all that was done or said.

"You are on my property," said the Mexican, haughtily, "and I want you to leave at once."

Frank coolly took out his watch and noted the time.

"We shall leave in just one hour to the minute, senor. We have not had our breakfast yet."

"You will leave now—at once—or take the consequences," growled the other.

"In one hour, senor."

"Then I'll summon my men and have you all arrested," and he started to leave.

"Senor, I arrest you!" said Frank, "and will hold you till I am ready to go. Hold up your hands!"

And at the words the young inventor covered him with his revolver.

The Mexican turned pale, but made no motion to obey the order.

"Hold up your hands, or I'll put an ounce of lead through you!" cried Frank, sternly; and this time the fellow obeyed the command.

"Go through him, Pomp, and see if he is armed."

Pomp searched him thoroughly, and found only a small dagger.

"That isn't much of a weapon to have," remarked Frank. "Now, senor, you will take



your seat there by the fire and keep us company till we are ready to leave your estate."

The Mexican obeyed, and gazed around at the others without uttering a word.

"Kensel, please keep guard over him while Sallinger and I catch some fish for our breakfast."

"Yes, I'll keep him all right," replied Kensel, drawing his revolver and taking a seat not far from the prisoner.

In a little while they had caught fish enough for breakfast, and Pomp had them in the pan. When breakfast was ready Frank invited his prisoner to partake of it with them. But he surlily declined.

"All aboard!" cried Frank, as soon as the meal was disposed of.

They sprang aboard, and a minute later the airship began to ascend, Barney and Pomp leaning over the rail and laughing derisively at the Mexican.

"We are all right now for a good day's work," said Sallinger.

"Yes, and I hope we shall find the route a good one for a railway," replied Frank, "for this is the richest country in the world through here, when one takes climate and soil into consideration."

The valley over which they were sailing seemed to be hundreds of miles in length, and they were beginning to wonder when they would come to the end of it, when towards sunset a mountain range loomed up in front of them.

"Ah, there's the end of this valley!" said Kensel, as he gazed at the mountain.

Sallinger looked disappointed for a moment or two; but, seizing a glass, he made a sweeping survey of the range.

"There's an outlet for this river below us somewhere," he said, "or else it runs up hill—a thing I never knew a river to do by itself yet."

"You are right about that," said Frank. "It flows through a gap somewhere, you may depend upon it."

"But why can't we see it? It appears to be a solid mountain range in front of us."

"Because we are too far off to see where the gap winds around some spur, perhaps, which prevents us from seeing through it—at least, that is the only explanation I can give of it."

In an hour's time they were near enough to the mountains to see where the little river ran through. It entered a narrow gap which made a sharp curve to the left, after going a few hundred yards, which accounted for the appearance of a solid mountain at a long distance.

As they entered the gap they were hundreds of feet below the tops of the peaks on each side of the river.

"It is mostly rock," said Sallinger, "and very solid rock at that."

"Yes," returned Kensel. "They will have some blasting to do here."

"But no tunnelling," remarked Frank. "I think the passage is wide enough to permit a railway track to be laid along the banks of the river."

The gap was about three and a-half miles in length, and then it emerged into a sloping table-land, with level country in the dim distance beyond.

The river became a roaring rapid for many miles. In one place they espied a beautiful cascade, the entire river going over a shelving rock in an unbroken body, falling a distance of fifty or sixty feet.

They camped that night on the rocky banks of the stream, and were on the wing early the following morning.

"This is one of the finest days we have had for a week," remarked Kensel, as he drew in a deep breath of the sweet air.

"Yes," said Sallinger. "I was just going to remark it myself. The air is still, and yet laden with the perfume of flowers."

"Yes, and I sometimes think Mexico has the most fragrant flowers in the world."

"She is particularly rich in that respect," put in Frank. "But the most remarkable country in the world is Australia. There they have the most beautiful birds, but they have no voice, save harsh, grating sounds; and while the most beautiful flowers bloom there they have no fragrance."

"I have read of such things" said Sallinger, "but have no desire to see them. The most lovely flower is nothing to me if it has no perfume, and——"

"Ugh! ugh! Oh, lor'!" yelled Pomp, upsetting two stools in the cabin and madly dashing out on deck, where Frank and the other two were smoking and talking.

Ere Frank could ask what was the matter an immense snake crawled out from the cabin in hot pursuit of Pomp, hissing like escaping steam.

"Good heavens!" gasped Sallinger.

The snake was as large round as a man's leg, and had fangs that made the blood run cold in our hero's veins. But he was between them and the cabin, and, seeing four instead of one, he stopped and began to coil himself to act on the defensive.

Frank drew his revolver and aimed at the serpent's head. He fired, and the bullet missed the head, but lodged in the coil.

That set the serpent into a fighting rage. He struck out for Frank, but the young inventor fired again, and so close to the serpent's head was the revolver that the reptile became alarmed and made a dash for the side of the airship.

The next moment it went overboard, and a fervent "Thank Heaven!" went up from everyone on board, and they rushed to the side of the airship to peer over at the falling snake.

It appeared to be twelve or fifteen feet long as it squirmed, twisted, and turned over and over in its descent.



"It will strike on a rock!" exclaimed Frank, as he saw the course of the descent.

So it did, and it struck so hard that our heroes heard it at the height of a quarter of a mile.

"That killed him!" cried Kensel.

"Of course it did. Nothing could stand such a fall as that!"

"Let us down, Barney," said Frank. "I want to see that snake when he isn't quite so dangerous. I never had such a surprise in my life."

"How did he get on board?" Sallinger asked.

"He must have crawled aboard while we were eating breakfast. He could not have done so at any other time without being seen."

By this time the airship had settled down within a few feet of the monster serpent, and all hands got out to take a look at it.

They measured him, and found that he was about thirteen feet in length. Then they once more ascended, and the survey was resumed. The view towards the west was a grand one.

The land sloped gradually towards the coast, and the beautiful river went leaping and bounding on its way to the sea, sparkling like molten silver in the sunlight.

"There can be no difficulty in building a road through here," said Kensel.

"None in the least," replied Sallinger. "I never saw a more beautiful country for railway-making. It will be a long grade, though, from the mountains to the sea level."

"Yes; but, as it is not a steep one, it will give no trouble."

"We shall soon begin to strike the orange, lemon, and cocoanut," said Frank, as he looked over the grand panorama below.

The airship moved westward with a steady pace. The country gradually became more level till a broad river came into view.

"There's an orange grove over there," said Frank, a little later, pointing to the left, where he could see the yellow fruit by means of the field-glass. "We'll help ourselves to some of the fruit."

He guided the ship right down into the orange grove, where the trees were hanging full of the ripe, delicious fruit.

"Now, gather some of them quickly," he said, "and let's away before the owner gets after us."

They all sprang out, and in less than ten minutes had nearly a barrel of ripe oranges gathered.

They hurried on board, and the rotascope had just begun to revolve, when the deep baying of a pack of bloodhounds was heard.

Just as the airship cleared the ground the great dogs came bounding up to it. They sprang up and tried to catch hold of it. Barney threw out the end of a rope, which had a knot on the end of it. One of the bloodhounds caught the knot in his mouth with a savageness that made Kensel shudder. But when Barney attempted to pull the rope in he found that the bloodhound had buried his teeth in the knot, and either could not, or would not, let go of it.

"Begorra!" exclaimed Barney, "I've got the baste!"

The dog was nearly as heavy as Barney himself, and but for the fact that the rope was fastened to one of the stanchions he would have been drawn overboard.

As the airship ascended the big dog was drawn up from out of the yelping pack. He struggled hard to free himself, and yelped with terror as he felt himself being drawn up.

"Hi, dar!" yelled Pomp, as he took in the situation. "Dat dog am comin' arter us!"

"What in thunder are you doing, Barney?" called Frank.

"Bedad, it's the dog, sor!" replied Barney. "Shure, an' he wants ter go wid us!"

By this time the dog was sailing above the tree-tops, and the yelping pack below raised a tremendous hullabaloo over the matter.

Crack! went a gun from the orange grove, and a bullet whistled close by Barney's ear.

Then came a series of wild Mexican whoops, and a man, gun in hand, was seen running about yelling like a lunatic. But the bloodhounds made such a racket that it was impossible to make out what he was saying.

"I am sorry for the dog," said Frank, "for he is game to the last."

"Yes," said Kensel. "Can't we save him in some way? I'd hate to see him fall."

"I don't know what to do. We should have to shoot him if we drew him aboard."

"Go over the river and descend low enough to let him down into the water. Then we can draw him up near enough to cut the rope and let him swim out."

"Good! I'll do it!" and the course of the ship was changed so as to take it over the river.

There it was lowered till the dog was in the water. Barney drew his knife and pulled the dog up to within a few feet of him and cut the rope. The moment he felt himself free the dog struck out for the bank. When he reached the land he climbed up out of the water, shook the damp from his sides, and made a rush for home at the top of his speed.

"That dog will never forget his experience to-day as long as he lives," said Frank, laugh-

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ing at the tremendous speed the dog was making.

"What must that Mexican think?" Kensel asked, gazing at that worthy half a mile away.

"Oh, he thinks the evil days have come, and will cross himself forty times a minute every time he thinks of us."

"How are the oranges?" Frank asked, some time later.

They had forgotten all about them in the excitement about the dog. But now they fell to and tested them. They were delicious; they had ripened on the tree, which the oranges that get to London never do.

"How exquisite!" exclaimed Kensel. "I never tasted such sweet oranges in my life."

"No, I suppose not. That is the way to get a good orange—let it ripen on the tree. It makes a vast difference in the flavour and sweetness."

"Yes, I suppose it does. I don't think I really ever had as many oranges as I wanted to eat. I am going to eat all I want this time."

During this conversation the airship floated down the river on the current.

In a little while they had passed below the orange grove and were on their way down the river, eating their oranges and talking over the dog adventure.

"Steady, now!" cried Frank, presently. "We are going down!"

They looked out and saw a small clearing on the river bank where they could have ample room for a camp. The airship soon settled down within a few paces of the water, and Barney sprang out.

They spent the remainder of the day in camp, but after breakfast next morning they ascended again and moved back up the river to where they had left off the survey, and then started for the coast.

Nothing worth recording befell them thereafter until the sea was reached. Then, however, Frank made a startling proposition.

He and his friends were talking about the success of their survey, when the young inventor suggested that Sallinger and Kensel should write out their reports and send them home at the first available opportunity.

"But can we send them back faster than we could take them?" asked Kensel.

"Yes," answered Frank, "for I am not going back to New York direct."

"Where are you going, then?" they both asked.

"I don't know. I do not care to go back till I have seen some of the world."

Kensel roared.

"See some of the world! What part of the known world have you not seen?"

"There's many a corner I have not seen yet," replied Frank; "and now, while I am down here in this part of the world, I want to see some of it."

"Where do you wish to go?" Kensel asked.

"I should like to go down the Pacific coast

to Cape Horn. What do you fellows say to that?"

Kensel and Sallinger looked at each other as if each were waiting for the other to speak first.

"I am willing," said Kensel, "if it doesn't cost too much."

"Oh, it shall not cost you a cent!" said Frank. "You two shall go as my guests if you go at all. My contract with the railway syndicate ends with the completion of the survey of the route."

"That's so. I accept your invitation," said Kensel.

"What say you, Sallinger?"

"I accept, too," was the reply. "But where can we mail our reports?"

"Oh, we can sail over to some responsible post-office and mail it. Or we might sail out to some ship bound for San Francisco and get the captain to post it there for you."

"That would be a novelty, indeed."

"Yes, I would like to do that."

"We'll start to-morrow, then, if you can finish your reports by that time."

"Kensel has finished his already, and I'll get mine done if I have to sit up all night," declared Sallinger.

"You had better get to work at it right away, then. Kensel and I will go out and try our luck at getting a good supper for you. Barney and Pomp will remain to guard the ship and keep monkeys and snakes from interfering with you."

Sallinger finished his cigar and went to work to get his report in good shape to be sent back to the syndicate of capitalists in New York.

Frank and Kensel took their rifles and went out to make an afternoon of it, leaving Sallinger alone with his big task.

When the two friends returned to camp a little before sunset they found that Sallinger had completed his report, and that Barney and Pomp had succeeded in catching several large trout.

The hunters had failed to kill anything that was fit for food, and so had to depend on the fish for supper, as they did for the noonday meal.

They spent the evening till bed-time telling stories, and then retired to sleep and dream of the extensive trip they had arranged to undertake.

They were up bright and early the next morning, and after a breakfast on fish, bread, coffee, and butter, prepared to leave the spot.

The sun was about an hour high when the airship ascended.

"I see a vessel!" cried Kensel, when they were up about a quarter of a mile.

"She is twenty miles away, too," said Frank, looking at the ship in the distance. "But she is the ship we want, for she's heading northward."

"Let's go out there and give the skipper



and crew a good scare," suggested Kensel, laughingly.

"Just what I was thinking of," said Frank.

The airship turned in that direction, and in a few minutes it was sailing above the blue waters of the Pacific.

The ship was a long way out, and it took our heroes nearly two hours to reach it. But long before they were in hailing distance it was plainly seen that the crew of the ship were intensely excited over the appearance of the airship.

The captain of the ship stood by with trumpet and glass.

"What ship is that?" Frank asked.

"The 'Sea Gull,' of San Francisco, homeward bound," replied the captain. "What craft is that?"

"The 'Flying Dutchman,'" replied the young inventor. "Frank Reade's airship out on a cruise.

"Captain," Frank went on, after a short interchange of compliments, "we came to ask you to mail some letters for us in San Francisco. They are very important. Will you do us that favour?"

"With all my heart," said the captain. "Come down with your letters."

"They are in the box which we will drop on your deck."

The box was dropped and the captain took charge of it.

"We may meet again, captain, and then I hope we may have a chance to get better acquainted."

"Yes," replied the captain; "I would like very much to meet you again, Mr. Reade. Where are you bound now?"

"We're going down the Pacific coast of Central and South America. We have come across from the Rio Grande."

After a few words more our heroes bade adieu to the captain and his crew and started down the coast, steering towards the shore as they moved southward.

However, the record of their adventures to Cape Horn must be left to a future time. Suffice it to say that the crew of the airship returned safely home.

When they reached New York City they were tendered a grand reception by the directors of the Mexican Railway Company.

The survey had been a marked success, as it put them at least a year ahead of their rivals, and gave them a choice of routes. The company did not regret the expense of the airship, and cheerfully paid the bill with many thanks.

Having settled up accounts our hero returned to his home in the West, there to rest with his friends till duty should again call his inventive genius into requisition.

THE END.

## Your Editor's Corner.

If you are a new reader you will no doubt be interested to know that this book is one of a set of four published on the same date. Three other stories of the redoubtable Frank Reade and his merry companions are waiting for you at the newsagents'. Their titles are: No. 25, "Frank Reade on the Wing"; No. 26, "Frank Reade's Sea Serpent"; No. 27, "Frank Reade in Slaveland."

So, you see, if you like "Frank Reade, Explorer," there is plenty more enjoyment to be obtained for the expenditure of a small halfpenny. Each of the stories is complete in one book, and each shows our hero in a different part of the world and with a new invention.

### The World-Wide Library.

I wrote in No. 25 about the latest library from Aldine House, but I feel that it is quite important enough to justify a repetition of the news.

As you know full well the Aldine Publishing Company have been responsible for many new ventures of late in the reading world; but it is safe to say that none will create as good an impression as the **WORLD-WIDE LIBRARY**, the newest of these new publications.

The **WORLD-WIDE LIBRARY** is quite a thing apart, inasmuch as each number will contain a copyright novel equal to any volume published at five shillings. The first is on sale now, and can be obtained from any bookseller or newsagent **FOR SIXPENCE**.

### A Land of Romance.

The title is "Blood Brothers," and its author is J. Weedon Birch. It is a story of South Africa, that land of never-ending romance and adventure, of which Mr. Birch is well fitted to write.

As a boy the author went out to South Africa, determined to make good—or never return. He made good, and returned; and he came back with a full knowledge of the country and the remembrance of many startling adventures fresh in his mind.

### Nothing Like It.

He served through the Matabele Campaign, and was Transport Rider in the days of the Boer War.

It is of the Matabele War that Mr. Birch writes in "Blood Brothers," and he has packed his story with exciting incidents from beginning to end. There is nothing on the market like it to-day, and certainly nothing as good at the low price of sixpence.